

# **Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015**

## **Introduction and Summary**



City of Eau Claire Wisconsin

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# Introduction and Summary

## Scope and Purpose

### Updated Guide to City Development

This plan replaces the 2005 version as a guide for decisions about the growth of Eau Claire through 2030. The plan addresses all locations that are expected to be part of Eau Claire in 2030 plus the public facilities and services that support private investment.

The plan shows a sound and responsible pattern of growth and is meant to coordinate public and private development decisions.

The *Comprehensive Plan* is the basis for the City's subdivision regulations, official maps and amendments to the zoning ordinance and zoning map. The plan is a guide for the Council, Plan Commission and other advisors when they review development proposals and budget for improvements. The plan also guides public spending for roads, utilities, parks, housing and business growth.

### Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Law

The *Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan 2015* complies with the requirements of Chapter 66 of the Wisconsin law. That law requires that all City actions that affect official mapping, subdivision regulations and zoning ordinances must be guided by a comprehensive plan adopted by the City Council. The law, however, leaves decisions about the timing and location of development to local communities.

### A Legacy of City Planning

The 2015 *Comprehensive Plan* is the most recent in a series for Eau Claire and builds on prior plans. The first comprehensive plan was completed in 1953 and focused on land use. That was followed in 1968 by a more detailed plan written under the federal requirements. In 1982, Eau Claire replaced its single comprehensive plan with a series of plans for land use, parks, roads, business and Downtown. In 1993, the City adopted a plan that included additional subjects. The 2005 plan built on the 1993 plan and included major new ideas about how to manage growth on the edge of the city.

In addition, the City has prepared plans for specific locations or topics over the past fifteen years, including:

- *Third Ward Neighborhood Plan*, 2001
- *Downtown Action Plan*, 2001
- *North River Fronts Neighborhood Plan*, 1981, updated 1987 and 2003
- *East Side Hill Neighborhood Plan*, 2006
- *Clairemont Avenue Educational and Medical District Plan*, 2009
- *Water Street Commercial District Plan*, 1982, updated 2009
- *Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan*, 2010
- *West Riverside District Plan*, 2010
- *Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan*, DECI, 2012

- *Waterways Plan*, 1988, updated 2012
- *Parks and Open Space Five-Year Plan*, 2013
- *Sewer Service Area Plans*, 2013
- *Historic Randall Park Neighborhood Plan*, 1995, updated 2014
- *Downtown Parking Study*, 2015
- *Municipal Water System Plan*, 2015.

That legacy of planning has contributed to the quality of this comprehensive plan.

## Planning Process

This plan was prepared by City staff with the help of Weber Community Planning.

A committee of 40 citizens appointed by the Plan Commission helped discover issues, verify the analysis, generate ideas and refine the recommendations. That group met monthly from September 2014 through June 2015. All of their meetings were advertised and open to the public. In addition, city-wide review and comment meetings were held in January and June.

## Document Organization

The central elements of the *Eau Claire Comprehensive Plan* are the goals, objectives, and policies in each of the plan chapters.

The plan consists of two volumes:

- The Assessment of Conditions and Issues
- Plans and Policies.

The plan chapters each include goals, objectives, policies, maps and implementation actions and provide policy direction on:

- |                                |                                     |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2: Land use                    | 9: Neighborhoods and districts      |
| 3: Transportation              | 10: Housing                         |
| 4: Public utilities            | 11: Historic and cultural resources |
| 5: Parks, trails and greenways | 12: Downtown                        |
| 6: Natural resources           | 13: Community facilities            |
| 7: Economic development        | 14: Governmental cooperation        |
| 8: Urban design                | 15: Plan implementation.            |

## What's New in the 2015 Plan?

The 2015 plan continues many of the policies of the 2005 edition. However, this plan has not needed to emphasize perimeter growth and, instead, proposes a major new effort to improve the central neighborhoods. Other major additions and changes are described below.

## Summary of Accomplishments and Changes since the 2005 Plan

The first chapter of the Assessment of Conditions and Issues describes the major changes that occurred in Eau Claire since the 2005 plan. The biggest were:

- The agreements with the adjacent Towns regarding residential lot size in the Sewer Service Area;
- The Great Recession;
- Rebuilding Hastings Way from a State highway to a landscaped City road with four lanes instead of six;
- New buildings in all four quadrants of Downtown, including housing, offices, retail and medical buildings helped by parks, trails and street edge improvements;
- Updating the *Waterways Plan*.

## Updated List of Major Planning Issues

The list of major planning issues, or questions, was updated to reflect the changing planning environment. Many prior issues have been resolved. The most significant issues facing this plan were:

- **Household Income and Employment:** What, if anything, should the City do to promote the growth of living-wage jobs, help raise incomes and reduce the rate of poverty, unemployment and under-employment and their debilitating personal effects among Eau Claire residents, particularly households with children?  
*Response: Refer to the plans for Economic Development, Housing, Neighborhoods, Transportation and Land Use, along with the Demographic Analysis (page 2-13).*
- **Neighborhood Improvement:** What level of municipal effort should be devoted to helping improve the older neighborhoods? Should the City devote an extra measure of effort to the older neighborhoods compared to the newer areas?  
*Response: Refer to the Neighborhoods Plan, Chapter 9.*
- **Downtown Redevelopment:** What should be the next steps in the rebirth of the North Barstow District and the South Barstow District?  
*Response: Refer to the Downtown Plan, Chapter 12.*

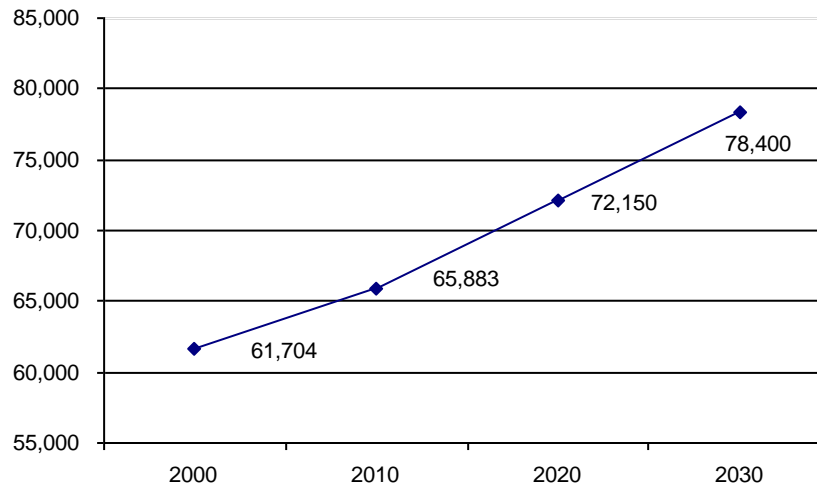
## Major Themes of this Plan

1. Be an attractive city where people want to live and work
2. Thrive as a regional center with good jobs in education, health care and manufacturing
3. Achieve compact growth; include nodes of higher intensity; build move-up housing; maintain a clear rural edge
4. Bring about redevelopment and infill growth, particularly in the older neighborhoods
5. Improve household economic well-being
6. Practice environmental stewardship.

### Growth Trends and Projections

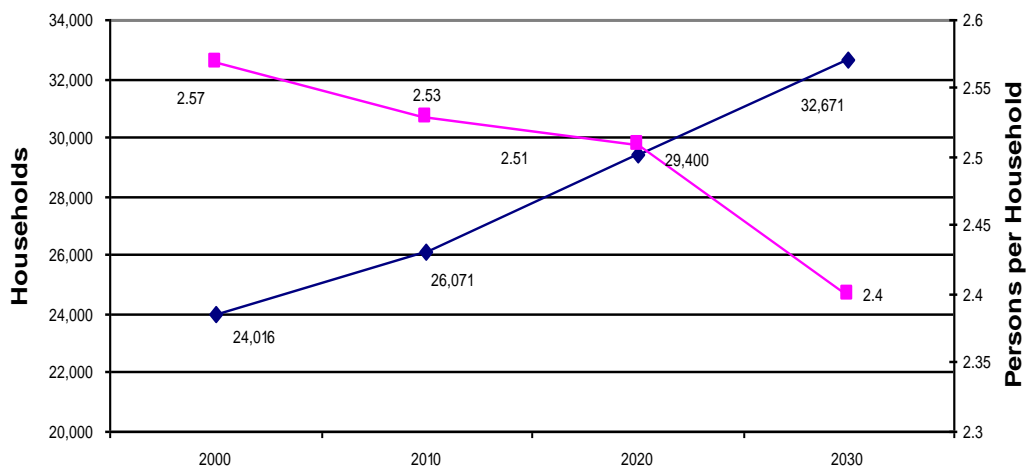
The 2015 *Comprehensive Plan* predicts that growth through 2030 will continue at about the same rate of increase as the past thirty to forty years.

**Figure 1-1: Forecast of Population to 2030**



The rate of households growth is expected to exceed that of population because it is assumed that the average household size will continue to decrease slightly, following the trend of the past twenty years.

**Figure 1-2: Forecast of Households and Persons per Household, 2000 to 2030**



These forecasts and other assumptions indicate that Eau Claire may need approximately 1,800 acres of land between years 2015 and 2030 to accommodate residential growth, including land either inside or outside the current City boundary.

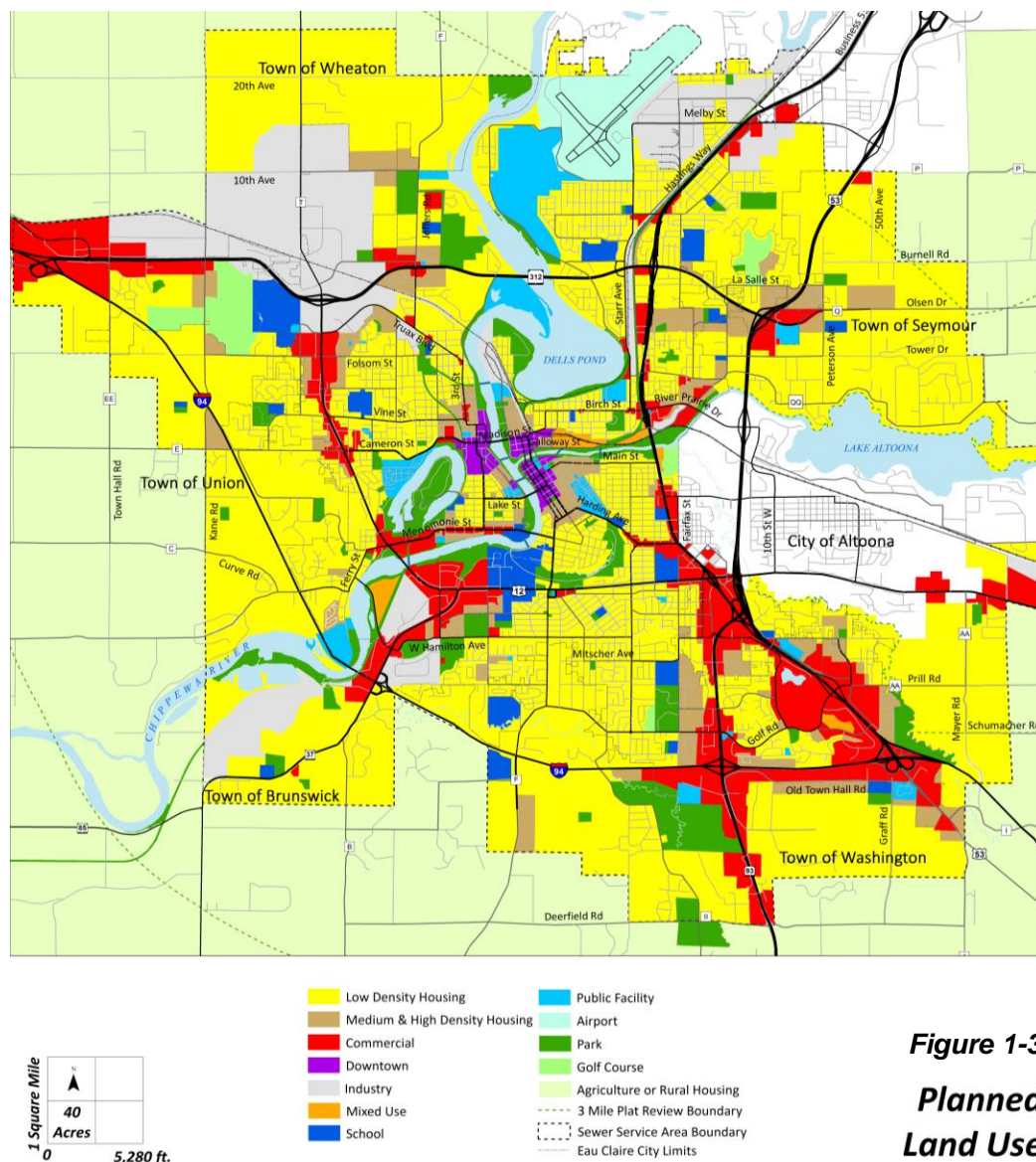


## Land Use Plan

Minor changes were made to the land use plan map, but the land use and growth management policies are largely unchanged. The fringe growth management policies accurately reflect the Intergovernmental Agreements with the Towns. More emphasis is placed on redevelopment, infill growth and central neighborhood or downtown renewal. The recent neighborhood, district and river corridor plans are all included. The need for better commercial design guidelines or standards was noted.

Figure 1-3, Planned Land Use, illustrates a proposed general pattern of future land use for Eau Claire and its edges based on the goals, objectives and policies of the plan.

City officials and staff will use the Planned Land Use map along with the related objectives and policies to help make decisions about land development, rezonings and public works. Table 2-2 in the Land Use Plan chapter describes each category and presents ways to judge the location of various land uses.



### **Transportation Plan**

Nearly all of the work listed in the 2005 plan has been done, and there are now few major traffic problems in Eau Claire. This plan has more emphasis on bicycling and walking than previously; the policy requiring sidewalks and trees along the streets has been retained and emphasized. The pattern of future major streets in the Sewer Service Area outside the City has been updated and reflects the regional plan.

The plan presents ways to improve movement over or under I-94 to growth areas, improve Galloway Street to complement Birch Street and reduce congestion near Golf Road and Highway 53.

### **Public Utilities Plan**

The Public Utilities Plan has benefited from the Intergovernmental Agreements.

Although the sewage treatment plant was recently upgraded, the main sewage collection pipes still need work.

Major repairs to the water system are guided by the 2015 system plan.

The approach to surface water has changed from draining it with pipes to moving it naturally, filtering it in ponds and letting some or all of it seep into the ground.

### **Parks, Trails and Greenways Plan**

This plan is a minor mid-course correction because it continues and affirms a history of parks planning and improvements.

Six new Neighborhood Parks are proposed in perimeter locations along with two new park-school sites. Also proposed is a future Chippewa River Waterfront Park near 80<sup>th</sup> Street in the current Town of Wheaton.

One new Neighborhood Playground is proposed between Folsom and Bolles Streets, just south of Roosevelt School, where two new bicycle paths intersect.

Additional Greenways with trails are planned along both the Chippewa and Eau Claire Rivers. Another greenway trail is proposed along the Xcel power line and Highway 312.

### **Natural Resources Plan**

The Natural Resources Plan continues to emphasize water quality and supports the features of the plan and permit approved by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Plan addresses public education, illegal discharges, runoff from construction sites, clean stormwater and water quality checks.

The City will continue to use laws, site design and land purchases to protect floodplains, shorelands and wetlands. Lowes Creek deserves special protection because it is a clear, cold trout stream.

The City should make sure that trees will be planted along every minor street and major road.

Finally, the City should adopt a law that protects trees on steep slopes and along wooded bluff lines.



## Economic Development Plan

This plan is tied more closely than ever to local leadership because it includes the 2013 Policy Priorities of the Economic Policy Advisory Committee, a private and public group.

Most of the prior programs and practices have been carried forward but now there is more weight given to re-using sites in central locations, especially in and around Downtown.

A new location that offers sites for small industries, support businesses and building contractors is needed.

Policies are included in the topics of leadership, marketing, site readiness, redevelopment, quality of place, workforce, recruitment, retention and incentives.

## Urban Design

The Urban Design chapter continues most of the 2005 policies but includes the idea of writing design guidelines for commercial development and creating diversified “activity centers.” The chapter was shortened somewhat and given better photo examples.

Topics include site and building design, new neighborhoods, established neighborhoods, activity centers, waterfronts, road corridors and parks.

Standards are presented for appropriately-narrow residential streets with trees and sidewalks. These streets are the most important visual feature of the entire city.

Traditional neighborhood design is honored.

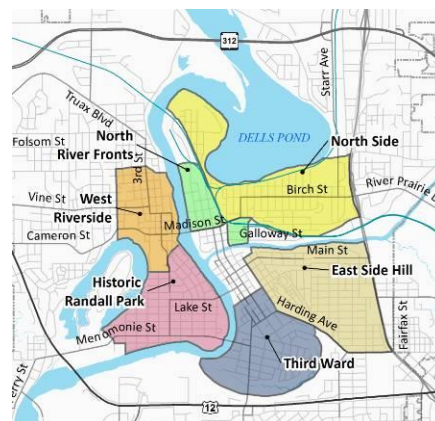
## Neighborhoods and Districts Plan

For the first time, a *Comprehensive Plan* chapter is devoted to the older neighborhoods even though several individual neighborhood plans have been prepared. Rather than try to meld all of those separate plans into one, this chapter presents a city-wide strategy for public and private actions to improve housing and public facilities in addition to social and economic well being.

Improving the housing and the business districts in the neighborhoods around downtown will require a multi-pronged, long-term effort by many groups and individuals working together.

Residential and business district revitalization are one part of a campaign of community development, the others being jobs and job-readiness, health, and education or training. The experience of other cities shows that a campaign of physical renewal will probably be most successful if all the components are included.

The central recommendation of the plan is to convene several meetings of residents, leaders, decision-makers and specialists to plan a strategy for central neighborhood rebirth.



In particular, the community should study whether a non-profit neighborhood development corporation should be formed and what its initial charge might be.

The City and County should also consider improving some of their facilities and services in these neighborhoods.

### **Housing Assistance, Diversity and Design Plan**

The Housing Plan presents the several assistance programs provided by the Housing Authority of Eau Claire, notes how the land use plan allows for a variety of housing to serve a changing population and describes the use of the City's design guidelines for multiple-family housing.

### **Downtown Plan**

The Downtown Plan is a guide for the major public and private investments that ought to be made over the next twenty years to promote the economic and civic betterment of Downtown. The recommendations of the plan focus on the continued evolution of Downtown into a center that is active both day and night, seven days a week. The plan builds on the strengths of the Downtown location and points out the opportunities for additional retail, office, civic and housing uses, as well as the physical and public policy work needed to attract and sustain better buildings and investments.

Ideas were included from the 2001 *Downtown Action Agenda* and the 2012 *Downtown Redevelopment Master Plan*.

The plan recommends that the City prepare a plan to guide the next stage of North Barstow renewal.

It defines the roles of the several organizations working Downtown and lists the available incentives.

Several sites that appear prime for change are called out in the North and South Barstow Districts and along the Oxford Street corridor.

Design principles are recommended, particularly the importance of having many doors and windows along the sidewalk. The plan emphasizes the need to take advantage of riverfront views and public access.

Eau Claire Street should be rebuilt as a “convertible street” from Farwell Street to Graham Avenue. That would allow it to be temporarily closed to auto traffic and used for events, performances, celebrations and strolling. Sidewalks should be improved with special patterns, flat curbs with trench drains should be used, tent tie-down rings should be embedded, and the street pavement should be decorative. A new park between City Hall and the Phillips Library should anchor the eastern end.

The Barstow, Madison, Farwell, Lake and Fifth loop system should also be enhanced.



A rendering of Eau Claire Street rebuilt with sidewalks, low curbs and other improvements.





### **Historic and Cultural Resources Plan**

A recommendation from the Historic and Cultural Resources Plan is that the Council should restore the integrity of the two locally-named districts as well as the individually-named properties that were removed from local status in 1992. The Council should consider the 2011 proposal by the Historic Landmarks Commission to restore the local status through a phase-in process.

### **Community Facilities Plan**

The Community Facilities Plan calls for allowing retired places of public worship to be re-used for housing or small businesses as long as the neighborhood look and feel are kept.

Give a favorable reception to the Menomonie Street event and recreation center proposed by the University and its partners. In conjunction, support the idea of master-planned redevelopment along that corridor between Clairemont Avenue and the Hobbs Ice Arena that may include businesses and housing, centered on the University facility.

Planners should think about creating a new zoning district for the Chippewa Valley Regional Airport to clarify the airport's rights and responsibilities regarding non-aviation land use.

### **Governmental Cooperation Plan**

This chapter acknowledges and reiterates the agreements negotiated with the adjacent Towns.

Agreements between the City and the Towns should be used for the orderly change of boundaries in the Extra-territorial Plat Approval Jurisdiction.

The plan affirms the long-standing policy that City sewer and water lines shall not be extended without land annexation into the City of Eau Claire or a cooperative boundary agreement to that effect.

The City should enter agreements to share services or facilities with other governments when there is a clear net benefit to the City. The result should not be contrary to this *Comprehensive Plan*, particularly as it applies to fringe growth.

The City should continue to participate with Eau Claire County through the Joint Commission on Shared Services Initiatives.

The City will continue to work with the Eau Claire City-County Health Department on public health and housing inspections, particularly in a stepped-up effort to improve neighborhoods.

A line should be negotiated to show where the City of Eau Claire rather than the City of Altoona may annex land from the Town of Washington east of US 15 and south of US 12.



A growth management area in the Town of Washington near Eau Claire and Altoona.

The City should coordinate with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation on:

- Transferring to the DOT the jurisdiction of County Highway T, widening the road and building a bridge over the Union Pacific Railroad tracks
- Bringing passenger rail to Eau Claire from the Twin Cities and siting the station
- Building an interchange on I-94 at Cameron Street
- Rebuilding Downtown river bridges
- Studying and improving problem locations such as Golf Road at US 53 or Clairemont Avenue (US 12) at Hendrickson Drive (State Highway 37).

### **Sustainability Plan**

In 2009, the City adopted a plan that specifically guides its investments, ordinances and actions to promote sustainable long-term use of certain resources that it may affect directly or indirectly. This document was adopted into the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan* and supplements the policies of other chapters of the Plan. Policies throughout the *Comprehensive Plan* promote sustainable use of finite resources. Minor amendments have been drafted for review and approval during this plan update. Subjects include:

- Natural features including soil, water and vegetation
- City growth management
- Transportation
- Solid or hazardous waste
- Energy use and production
- Food production, consumption and waste
- Government purchasing.

### **Community Health Plan**

In 2013, the City Council adopted the Community Health chapter and incorporated it into the 2005 *Comprehensive Plan*. The City has worked as a convener and organizer among numerous public, private and not-for-profit groups and aligned its comprehensive planning policies with principles of healthy living.

To illustrate the breadth of this effort, the organizations involved in this broad effort include the Eau Claire Healthy Communities Council and its Chronic Disease Prevention Action Team, the Eau Claire City-County Health Department, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Mayo Clinic Health System, Sacred Heart Hospital, Marshfield Clinic, United Way of the Greater Chippewa Valley, the Eau Claire County Aging and Disability Resource Center, UW-Extension, the UW-EC Department of Nursing, the Feed My People Food Bank and others.

Examples of helpful City improvements or planning are its renewed attention to walking and bicycling, the Parks, Trails and Greenways System Plan, the railroad crossing “quiet zones,” a policy to attract a grocery store to the center of the city, the farmers’ market in Phoenix Park, community gardens in certain parks, and assistance to remediate sites containing hazardous waste.